

## Saints and Sacred Matter

### *The Cult of Relics in Byzantium and Beyond*

DUMBARTON OAKS SYMPOSIUM, 29 APRIL – 1 MAY 2011

SYMPOSIARCHS: CYNTHIA HAHN AND HOLGER A. KLEIN

The physical remains of holy men and women and objects associated with them embody aspects of the divine and therefore play a central role in a number of religions and cultures. Given their ability to link the past and present with an imagined future, sacred remains, or relics, were especially important to the development of Christianity as they testified to Christ's presence and ministry on earth, and after his Resurrection established a powerful connection between God and man. The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles bore early witness to the healing powers of Christ and his disciples and drew attention to the places where these miracles occurred. Moreover, cities such as Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Rome, where objects associated with Christ's Passion were kept and where bodies of saints and martyrs were buried, soon developed into important cult centers, drawing pilgrims in large numbers from across the late Roman Empire. Enshrined in sumptuous metal, ivory, or stone containers, relics formed an important physical and spiritual bond between heaven and earth, linking humans to their saintly advocates in heaven. As they were carried in liturgical processions, used in imperial ceremonies, and called upon in legal disputes and crises, relics—and, by extension, their shrines and precious containers—provided a visible link between the living and the venerated dead.

Coinciding with *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, a major exhibition on relics and reliquaries from late antiquity to the end of the Middle Ages at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, the symposium addressed a variety of issues

surrounding the cult of saints and relics in Byzantium, the medieval West, and the Islamic East. It posed a series of questions intended to open new windows onto the cult of saints and relics in Byzantium and beyond. How did early Christian cult practices emerge from ancient Greek, Roman, and Jewish traditions? How did reliquaries develop as containers of sacred matter, and what kinds of models inspired their earliest makers? What mechanisms governed the exchange and translation of holy relics and assured their efficacy in new social, religious, and cultural contexts? How did these objects and the shrines in which they were preserved and displayed transform the memory of extraordinary individuals into saintly bodies who connected heaven and earth? What role did art and architecture play in the construction of holiness and the animation of sacred matter? In what ways do physical objects link the past with the present and connect cities and their communities across time and space? What impact did relics have on the development of three-dimensional religious sculpture in the West, and what role did two-dimensional representations of holy figures play in the re-presentation of saintly bodies in the East?

The symposium was held at two venues, to a capacity crowd, at Dumbarton Oaks on Friday and Sunday and at the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore on Saturday, giving participants an opportunity to visit and explore the exhibition, paralleled at Dumbarton Oaks in the museum's *Cross-References*, a loan exhibition on the cross, and in the library's *Before the Blisses: Nineteenth-Century Connoisseurship of the Byzantine Minor Arts*.

FRIDAY, 29 APRIL (AT DUMBARTON OAKS)

*Introduction*

Holger A. Klein · Columbia University

*Decoration and Concealment: The Dynamics of the Early Christian and Byzantine Reliquary*  
Jaś Elsner · Corpus Christi College, Oxford

*Liturgical Time and the Religion of Relics in Early Byzantium*

Derek Krueger · University of North Carolina at Greensboro

*Figuring Relics: A Poetics of Enshrinement*  
Patricia Cox Miller · Syracuse University

*Embedded Fragments: Spatial and Material Rhetorics of Relics in Late Antique Churches*

Ann Marie Yasin · University of Southern California, Los Angeles

*"Grant Us to Share a Place and Lot with Them": The Architectural Setting of Relics (Ninth–Fourteenth Centuries)*

Robert G. Ousterhout · University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia and Vasileios Marinis · Yale University

*In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Mimetic Bodies and the Ecology of Mediation in Medieval Islam*

F. Barry Flood · New York University Institute of Fine Arts

*Making the Invisible Visible: Commemorating the Cult of Shi'i Imams in Safavid Iran*  
Kishwar Rizvi · Yale University

SATURDAY, 30 APRIL (AT THE WALTERS MUSEUM, BALTIMORE)

*Introduction*

Cynthia Hahn · Hunter College, CUNY

*Relics: The Making of a Tradition in Latin Christianity*  
Julia Smith · University of Glasgow

*The Memory of Objects: Spolia in Reliquaries*

Hiltrud Westermann-Angerhausen · Cologne

*Salvation on Display before the Eye of God: Relics, Reliquaries and the Politics of Treasure in Medieval Papal Rome*

Lucas Burkart · University of Basel

*The Sainte-Chapelle in Paris: Relics, Reliquaries, and the "Poetics of Enshrinement"*

Alyce Jordan · Northern Arizona University

SUNDAY, 1 MAY (AT DUMBARTON OAKS)

*The Relics of New Saints: Deposition, Translation, and Veneration in Middle and Late Byzantium*

Alice-Mary Talbot · Dumbarton Oaks, emerita

*A propos des reliques de l'enfance du Christ*

Jannic Durand · Musée du Louvre

*The Relics of Scholarship*

Anthony Cutler · University Park, Pennsylvania

*Concluding Remarks*

Margaret Mullett · Dumbarton Oaks